

**CONDUCTING INVESTIGATIONS**

**GROUP DISCUSSION**

**RESPONSIBLE PERSONAL CONDUCT**



**AUTHENTIC  
ASSESSMENT  
OF SOCIAL STUDIES**

**MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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# **AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Page #
Introduction	1
The Goal of the Authentic Assessment Project	1
How This Project Supports the Michigan Curriculum Framework	2
Standards of Authentic Instruction	2
Assessment Standards	2
How Performance Tasks Were Created	3
Field Trial Training	3
Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in Social Studies	3
The Authentic Assessment Scenario Templates	4
The Authentic Assessment Scenario Template Outline	4
The Scenario and Benchmarks	4
The Focus Question	4
Steps in Conducting an Investigation	5
Scoring an Investigation	6
Conducting a Discussion of Public Policy Issues	7
The Public Policy Issue Question	7
Scoring a Discussion of Public Policy Issues	8
Creating, Implementing, Reporting, and Evaluating Responsible Personal Conduct	9
Scoring Responsible Personal Conduct	10
How to Build Your Own Performance Task	11
Criteria for Choosing a Scenario	11
Guidelines for Formulating Public Policy Issue Questions	11
Using the Scoring Guides	12
<b>Classroom Analytic Scoring Guides</b>	
Conducting Investigations, Early Elementary	13
Conducting Investigations, Later Elementary	14
Conducting Investigations, Middle School	15
Conducting Investigations, High School	16
Group Discussion, Early Elementary	17
Group Discussion, Later Elementary	18
Group Discussion, Middle School	19
Group Discussion, High School	20
Responsible Personal Conduct, Early Elementary	21
Responsible Personal Conduct, Later Elementary	22
Responsible Personal Conduct, Middle School	23
Responsible Personal Conduct, High School	24

## Table of Contents (continued)

### Holistic Feature Scoring Guides

Conducting Investigations: Grades 3–8 .....	25
Conducting Investigations: High School .....	26
Group Discussion: Grades 3–12 .....	27
Responsible Personal Conduct: Grades 3–8 .....	28
Responsible Personal Conduct: High School .....	29
Group Discussion Scoring Table .....	30
The Performance Task Topics .....	31
How to Read the Notations .....	31

### PERFORMANCE TASKS FOR AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

#### Early Elementary

Wearing Hats in School .....	32
Who Gets to Play? .....	33
“You Can’t Play” .....	34
The Old House .....	35
The Little Lost Dog .....	36
Older Children on the Playground .....	37
Bicycle Safety .....	38
Litter .....	39
A New Neighborhood Park .....	40

#### Later Elementary

Restoring a Historic House .....	41
School Uniforms .....	42
Where May We Use Our Skateboards? .....	43
Foreign Cars in the United States .....	44
Who Gets to Use the Kickball Field? .....	45
The House With Four Pillars .....	46
Employment Versus Environment .....	47
Columbus Day .....	48
Code of Conduct for Schools .....	49

#### Middle School

An Endangered Bird Species .....	50
Tourists in Antarctica .....	51
The Future of Puerto Rico .....	52
Made in America .....	53
Cherokee Removal .....	54

## Table of Contents (continued)

Reconstruction in the American South .....	55
Urban Migration in Developing Countries .....	56
Slavery Under the United States Constitution .....	57
The Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River.....	58

### High School

Term Limits .....	59
Defining and Defending American Interest Abroad .....	60
Computer Communication .....	61
Balanced Federal Budgets .....	62
Federal Taxes .....	63
The Use of Tariffs to Achieve Economic Goals .....	64
China and the Environment .....	65
Discouraging Illegal Immigration to Michigan .....	66
Business Practices in Other Countries .....	67
Ethnic Conflict in the Balkans .....	68
National History Standards .....	69
Registration for the Draft .....	70
Some Core Democratic Values of American Constitutional Democracy .....	71
Definitions of Some Core Values of American Constitutional Democracy .....	72

# SOCIAL STUDIES AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT PROJECT

## INTRODUCTION

*Authentic Assessment of Social Studies* was written to help social studies teachers more completely implement the Michigan *Social Studies Content Standards and Benchmarks* by focusing on three important content standards: Conducting Investigations, Group Discussion, and Responsible Personal Conduct.

We believe, as do the teachers and students you will meet in the introductory video, that these three standards will enhance social studies instruction through the use of active learning, inquiry, group discussion, and responsible personal conduct.

The assessment of your students' work, using a uniform set of rubrics or scoring guides, will allow you to judge the progress of your students by a set of criteria based on the statewide standards for achievement in social studies.

Congratulations on taking this important first step—the training. If for some reason you have received this document without the opportunity to watch the introductory video, you can call (517) 373-4226 for information on the location of videos nearest you.

## THE GOAL OF THE AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT PROJECT

The purpose of social studies education is to create responsible citizens. To assess how schools are progressing towards meeting that goal, content standards for social studies have been developed. The content standards set our expectations of what every student should know and be able to do in social studies by high school graduation. Social studies assessments are being created to test student progress towards meeting those stated expectations.

The content standards represent the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we expect of responsible citizens. However, each standard does not lend itself to large-scale testing. Three standards have been excluded from statewide testing. They are: conducting investigations, group discussion, and responsible personal conduct. These three standards, while not lending themselves to large-scale assessment, are each important to meet the overall goal of creating responsible citizens.

The **Authentic Assessment Project** has as its goal the development of voluntary classroom level assessments to assess students' progress towards meeting the important standards of conducting investigations, group discussion, and responsible personal conduct. It is acknowledged that assessment of these standards is most appropriate at the classroom level. The standard Conducting Investigations, for example, requires students to demonstrate their ability to engage in extended inquiry. The inquiry process involves gathering data, formulating questions, and presenting information to an audience. The inquiry process is most successfully evaluated by the student's social studies teacher. The classroom teacher can assess and record progress over an extended period of time and give the student valuable feedback. The constraints of time and test security—common limitations of large-scale assessment—are eliminated when the assessment is conducted at the classroom level.

While it is recognized that the assessment process for these three standards is more properly assigned to the classroom, requirements of standardization are still important. The *Authentic Assessment of Social Studies* presents teachers with a standardized set of performance assessments for each grade K–12. Each assessment task is accompanied by a set of scoring rubrics to evaluate student work. It is hoped that by utilizing standard tasks and scoring procedures, teachers at every grade level in Michigan can move our students closer to our goal of creating responsible citizens.

## HOW THIS PROJECT SUPPORTS THE MICHIGAN CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

The *Michigan Curriculum Framework* is a coordinated effort by all content areas in Michigan to focus on standards-based reform targeted toward meeting a common goal of improving achievement for all students. The **Authentic Assessment Project** supports the teaching standards and the assessment standards elaborated on in the *Michigan Curriculum Framework*.

### STANDARDS OF AUTHENTIC INSTRUCTION

- **Higher-Order Thinking:** Instruction involves students in manipulating information and ideas by synthesizing, generalizing, explaining, or arriving at conclusions that produce new meaning and understandings for them.
- **Deep Knowledge:** Instruction addresses central ideas of a topic or discipline with enough thoroughness to explore connections and relationships and to produce relatively complex understanding.
- **Substantive Conversation:** Students engage in extended conversational exchanges with the teacher and/or peers about subject matter in a way that builds an improved and shared understanding of ideas or topics.
- **Connections to the World Beyond the Classroom:** Students make connections between substantive knowledge and either public problems or personal experiences.

Furthermore, the *Michigan Curriculum Framework* describes and advocates the use of seven assessment standards.

### ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

- ☐ **Organization of Information**  
The task asks students to organize, synthesize, interpret, explain, or evaluate complete information in addressing a concept, problem, or issue.
- ☐ **Consideration of Alternatives**  
The task asks students to consider alternative solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view in addressing a concept, problem, or issue.
- ☐ **Disciplinary Content**  
The task asks students to show understanding and/or use ideas, theories, or perspectives considered central to an academic or professional discipline.
- ☐ **Disciplinary Process**  
The task asks students to use methods of inquiry, research, or communication characteristic of an academic or professional discipline.
- ☐ **Elaborated Written Communication**  
The task asks students to elaborate on their understanding, explanations, or conclusions through extended writing.
- ☐ **Problem Connected to the World Beyond the Classroom**  
The task asks students to address a concept, problem, or issue that is similar to the one that they have encountered or are likely to encounter in life beyond the classroom.
- ☐ **Audience Beyond the School**  
The task asks students to communicate their knowledge, present a product or performance, or take some action for an audience beyond the teacher, classroom, and school building.



The *Authentic Assessment of Social Studies* is designed to give students many opportunities to use higher order thinking, employ knowledge learned in-depth, participate in substantive conversation, and make connections to the world beyond the classroom. The tasks of conducting investigations, group discussion, and responsible personal conduct require students to demonstrate on authentic assessment tasks the seven standards for assessment.

## **HOW PERFORMANCE TASKS WERE CREATED**

In January 1996 the Michigan Department of Education published a notice in the “MEAP Update” announcing the need for interested social studies educators to act as writers of performance tasks that would align with content standards not reflected on statewide assessments. The writing assignments were coordinated through Riverside Publishing and the Curriculum Development Program Unit of the Michigan Department of Education.

All performance task writing assignments were completed by the end of August 1996. These materials were reviewed for content and consistency. The goal was to develop five tasks for each grade K–8 and for each of the four social studies disciplines at the high school level. In all, 71 tasks were prepared for the field trial phase of development.

## **FIELD TRIAL TRAINING**

The outline of the *Authentic Assessment of Social Studies* was developed as part of a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to the Michigan Department of Education’s Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). To assess the integrity of the performance tasks written by the performance task writers, a field trial of the performance tasks and accompanying rubrics was proposed. Social studies teachers throughout the state were invited to participate. One hundred ninety-eight teachers, K–12, were given training in using the materials and were asked to give detailed comments about the tasks and rubrics. Their refinements and comments have led to the revisions present in this manual.

## **ALIGNMENT OF CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES**

A quick review of the social studies content standards and benchmarks often produces a sharp gasp and the inevitable question, “How will I ever incorporate everything into my instructional plan for students?” The curriculum designed by your school district will no doubt be an ambitious one. At the grade level that you teach, you will be expected to focus on benchmarks from all seven strands, incorporating history, geography, economics, civics, inquiry, public discourse and decision making, and responsible personal conduct.

As a teacher, you know instinctively what the experts tell us is true. Disconnected lessons without a central theme or focus, without opportunities for in-depth learning, lessons that do not require higher-order thinking, or that are not related to the child’s personal world of experience, are doomed. They are confusing to students, irrelevant, and easily forgotten.

How can we align our instructional plans with our curricular goals and design assessments which are evaluated based on a common set of state standards that engage students in meaningful ways? We believe that answering this question is the key to great social studies. Great social studies engages students in meaningful inquiry that requires depth of knowledge about the four key social studies disciplines of history, geography, civics, and economics.

This manual will provide you with one answer to this incredibly complex question. This approach integrates teaching the content standards and benchmarks in a meaningful context that requires students to participate actively. The writers who developed the scenarios included in this project chose topics they believed were appropriate for each grade K–12. The writers either teach the grade or had taught at the grade level for which they were writing. They sought topics they believed would: interest their students, could be quickly explored from a variety of points of view, and require the content knowledge demanded by at least two benchmarks.

Each scenario requires students to participate in three separate performances or tasks. Each performance is evaluated by the classroom teacher based on a standardized rubric. The performance tasks for each scenario K–12 is designed to assess the student’s progress on meeting the three standards of Conducting Investigations, Group Discussion, and Responsible Personal Conduct.

## **THE AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT SCENARIO TEMPLATES: HOW TO USE OUR SCENARIOS TO ENRICH YOUR SOCIAL STUDIES INSTRUCTION OR TO WRITE ONE OF YOUR OWN.**

Three scenarios for each grade level have been selected for inclusion in this manual. The outline or template for the scenarios and the instructions for each of the required performance tasks is identical. What changes, as students mature, is the complexity of the task, level of reflection or insight, and the degree of independence expected in carrying out the inquiry. Each scenario begins with an inquiry into a focus question, continues with the student participating in an informed group discussion, and concludes with a plan of action.

The outline or template for the scenarios is designed to allow you to take advantage of a teachable moment by designing a scenario yourself and launching your students into an inquiry that will integrate the social studies content standards into your curriculum. The examples provided follow this basic structure.

## **THE AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT SCENARIO TEMPLATE OUTLINE**

- **The Scenario and Benchmarks**

Each Scenario sets the context for Inquiry, Group Discussion, and Responsible Personal Conduct, and introduces the Focus Question. The scenarios were written to be of interest to students at designated grade levels. The brief scenario is followed by a list of benchmarks which link the performance task to the four disciplinary strands in the social studies content standards. Only a few of the linking benchmarks are listed. You should study these and other benchmarks carefully to help students make as many connections to the content standards as possible.

- **The Focus Question**

The Focus Question sets the stage for conducting an investigation. Tasks designed for early elementary grades center on questions about life in school and the local community. For the later elementary grades, the focus questions are about Michigan or the United States. By middle school the focus questions expand and encompass culture, a world region, or an international problem. Focus questions are vital to this project. The focus question targets the inquiry in which students are engaged so that all students will have content knowledge that they can use in the public issue discussion.

The focus question always appears in a box like the following example.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE FOCUS QUESTION</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">What should Americans do about celebrating Columbus Day?</p>
--

## STEPS IN CONDUCTING AN INVESTIGATION

- **Present the scenario** to the class for discussion. If a location is indicated, locate it on the map. Discuss any unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts.
- **Conduct a brainstorming session** with students to think about possible sources of information about the focus question. Students should include sources that deal specifically with the focus question, as well as more general sources.

The broadest possible list of potential sources should be generated, even though every student may not have access to all sources. In early grades the teacher will lead in locating the information. Examples of sources students should be considering are CD-ROM, interviews with knowledgeable members of the community, internet, government agencies, and library resources.

If students are relatively new at brainstorming, the teacher can lead off by offering a suggestion. If this is the first time you have done this activity with your students, you may discover that your access to resources is more limited than you expected.

This is one area where it is clear that you should work with your colleagues to collect information and keep it on file for future use. We have included some resources in this manual and would like to hear of others you have found useful!

- **Divide into research groups.** The goal of initial research is to quickly gather information about the topic. Research should focus on the relevant who, what, when, where, and why type questions: Who are the groups involved in this focus question? What are the sources of debate and controversy? Where is this taking place? Why is this an issue we should investigate? How is the question related to our lives?

This is meant to be a preliminary step, intended to provide students with enough familiarity about the topic so that they will be able to formulate a question for inquiry. This step should not take more than two days.

- **Share initial research.** Organize a session for students to share what they have learned with the rest of the class following the initial research. This sharing should be informal, with results listed on the chalkboard, chart paper, or overhead projector.

Older students would be expected to use appropriate information technologies as they gather information. K–2 students will need more supervision and direction as they conduct their investigation with the teacher taking the lead.

This step will allow you to monitor student progress and give them feedback about the appropriateness of data they have collected to help them formulate questions.

After gathering and sharing initial research, students are asked to think about the information in order to answer the focus question. They should be prepared to answer the question posed and support their answer with some of the gathered information.

This is a good time for you to assess the availability of student resources. If it will be impossible to get enough information for students to adequately support their inquiry question, you may want to modify or terminate the scenario.

- **Conduct an investigation.** Inquiry Standard V.2. Conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypotheses, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.

Following the initial research, each student should individually **develop a question for inquiry**. A few sample questions should be generated by the class before students are asked to develop their own. Establish groups or teams of students to work together on similar ideas that will facilitate their research.

In grades K–2 the class can generate a single question and investigate it with the teacher leading the students through the process.

Students should **gather data** on their question. A combination of classroom and home-study time will be used by students to complete their research on their question. It will be important for you to allow a long enough time period so that students who have written letters to government or private agencies can receive their replies. Students should **analyze their data and answer the question they posed**.

- **Review the scoring guide** which will be used to assess their report. Discuss with students the variety of formats that would be acceptable.

Organizing opportunities for peer review would help students think about how to report their conclusions and meet the requirements of the content standard. Notice that as students get older, the expectations for their report become more demanding.

- **Conduct student presentations** of the results of their investigations to the class. K–2 students may feel more comfortable in a one-on-one setting with their teacher or debrief their findings together as a class discussion.

Inquiry Benchmarks		
Early Elementary	V.2.4	Report the results of their investigation.
Later Elementary	V.2.4	Report the results of their investigation including the procedures followed.
Middle School	V.2.4	Report the results of their investigation including procedures followed and possible alternative conclusions.
High School	V.2.2	Report the results of their investigation including procedures followed and a rationale for their conclusions.

- **Evaluate individual students** on Standard V.2, Conducting Investigations, using the classroom analytic scoring guides provided.

### SCORING AN INVESTIGATION

- **Utilize performance standards** and scoring guides to evaluate each student's performance using the classroom analytic scoring guides provided in this manual.
- **Report performance to the student** and, through written comments or a face-to-face conference, relate to each student his/her progress toward meeting this standard.

## CONDUCTING A DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

At this stage the class will be ready to discuss a public policy issue question related to the topic they have been investigating. If you have written a scenario of your own, you will need to supply the students with a question to discuss or to work with your class to formulate one.

The Public Policy Issue Question always appears in a box like the following example:

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION	
Should United States policy making Columbus Day a Federal holiday be changed?	

- **Organize a student discussion** about the issue of public policy.

Once the Public Policy Issue Question has been chosen, students should be assigned to groups to discuss the issue. As students get older they should engage each other in conversations about issues pertaining to an ever expanding environment. That is, very young students would talk about self and family, and by grade 2 deal with issues pertaining to governing their school. As students move through the later elementary grades, their conversations should attempt to clarify and resolve issues pertaining to local, state, and national policy. By middle school the students should be prepared to deal with national and international public policy issues. The length of the discussion will change as students mature, from five minutes in early grades to twenty minutes in high school. The number of students in the group will vary as well. In early grades the discussion can be facilitated by the teacher and could include the whole class or a portion of it.

Group Discussion Benchmarks VI.2.1	
Early Elementary	Engage each other in conversations about issues pertaining to governing their school.
Later Elementary	Engage each other in conversations which attempt to clarify and resolve issues pertaining to local, state, and national policy.
Middle School	Engage each other in conversations which attempt to clarify and resolve national and international policy issues.
High School	Engage each other in elaborated conversations that deeply examine public policy issues and help make reasoned and informed decisions.

- **Review the scoring guide with the students.** Students should have many opportunities to practice group discussion before their final assessment. It will be helpful for students to observe and critique other students engaged in a group discussion. A “fishbowl” approach may work well for the purpose of introducing your students to this phase of the task. All aspects of the scoring guide should be reviewed.
- **Divide the students into groups** of four to six students. The number may depend on the age of students involved. Include students with varying ability levels and perspectives in each group.

During practice discussions you can monitor the quality of evidence used to support individual positions on the public policy issue, and provide informal feedback on discussion techniques.

To assist you, a mechanism for recording the discussion (either audio or video) will help with the evaluation. Whatever recording devices you plan to use in the actual scoring should also be part of the practice sessions. Students could also be instructed to conduct self-evaluations.

### **SCORING A DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES**

- **Evaluate each student's performance** using performance criteria, performance standards, and the scoring guide (see Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide Standard VI.2 Group Discussions).
- **Report performance to the student** through written comments or a face-to-face conference, relating to each student his/her progress toward meeting Standard VI.2.

## CREATING, IMPLEMENTING, REPORTING, AND EVALUATING RESPONSIBLE PERSONAL CONDUCT

Responsible personal conduct has two benchmarks at every instructional level. The activities included here are related to the second benchmark only. These benchmarks relate to participating in the development of plans or projects designed to tackle problems in the school, community, state, nation, or world.

Citizen Involvement Benchmarks VII.1.2	
Early Elementary	Participate in projects designed to help others in their local community.
Later Elementary	Engage in activities intended to contribute to solving a local, state, or national problem they have studied.
Middle School	Engage in activities intended to contribute to solving a national or international problem they have studied.
High School	Plan and conduct activities intended to advance their views on matters of public policy, report the results of their efforts, and evaluate their effectiveness.

This standard provides a link to the world outside the classroom. It is your responsibility to monitor the proposed plans of students for issues of safety and appropriateness. Following school and district rules in this regard is extremely important. Enlisting the support of parents may also benefit you and your students.

Students may brainstorm plans with a group, but individual efforts are evaluated. All students should be familiar with the scoring guide (see Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide for Standards VII.1) and with the basis of the evaluation of their work.

- **To formulate a plan suggest** that students begin with questions like: “What should I do if I want . . .?” or “How should I act if I want . . .?”
- **Encourage creativity and the use of technology** in the creation of their plans. For example, it may be possible to access local, state, national, and international experts using electronic mail, the Internet, the telephone, or by fax machine.

Keeping in mind that the plans will be evaluated for their effectiveness, every effort does not need to start from scratch. Students should research agencies and organizations which are already established and evaluate how their efforts could add to the effectiveness of your students’ plans.

- **Students should design and conduct their plans** using what they learned from their investigation and group discussion.

Teachers should review with the students the method by which their plans will be evaluated. Teachers should review plans for responsible, lawful, and safe behavior. These plans are intended to be individual creations with each student responsible for his/her own plan and its enactment. Students should create questions beginning “How should...” to guide the development of their plan.

In early grades, a single class plan may be appropriate.

- **Students should report the results** of their plans to the class. Formats for how the results of their plans could be reported should be discussed with the students prior to the due date.

Providing some time for a group brainstorming activity to decide on appropriate formats may be helpful to students who are not experienced in reporting to a large group. The scoring guide should be shared with the students prior to their presentation.

- **Students should evaluate their effectiveness.** A self-reflection paragraph on the effectiveness of their plan would be a good way for students to meet this requirement. Share with students the scoring guide, which requires accuracy in their evaluations.

### **SCORING RESPONSIBLE PERSONAL CONDUCT**

- **Evaluate each student's performance** using performance standards and scoring guides (see Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide for Standard VII.1). Students could conduct self-evaluations and discuss their conclusions with you either orally or in writing.
- **Report evaluation to the student** through written comments or a face-to-face conference, relating to each student his/her progress toward meeting this standard.



## HOW TO BUILD YOUR OWN PERFORMANCE TASK

The scenario template is designed to be easily adapted to any public policy issue of interest to you and your students. This manual contains several Scenarios, Focus Questions, and Public Policy Issue Questions that exemplify possible lessons for use in your classroom.

You can start to build your own performance task by choosing a scenario that suits your curriculum. If one of ours does not work, use our examples and the criteria listed below to guide you in building your own performance task.

### CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A SCENARIO

There are a number of factors you should consider when creating your own authentic assessment task scenario. The scenario should be:

1. Interesting to students;
2. Related to a substantive public policy issue;
3. Standards-based;
4. One for which research is available for students at your grade level;
5. Safe to have students engage in inquiry and in conformance with school and district policies;
6. Cross-disciplinary;
7. Appropriate for the time available; and
8. Able to meet with the approval of parents and other community members.

### GUIDELINES FOR FORMULATING PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTIONS

Public policy issue questions emerge whenever individuals or groups that represent a particular level of authority must make a decision or create policy that will affect our public lives. The performance task authors often refer to these as “should questions” because they usually start with the word “should” followed by a reference to the decision-making authority. Each “should question” can be evaluated against the following seven criteria:

1. **Age and grade appropriate.** Is this the kind of issue students are mature enough to consider? It would not be appropriate, for example, to ask young children to consider balanced budgets or capital punishment; conversely, playground rules would not be an appropriate issue for high school students.
2. The question represents a **true issue** that must be resolved collectively. The teacher should be clear about which collective body (i.e., authority) is supposed to resolve the issue, (e.g., his/her students, voters, a legislature, a board of directors, etc.).
3. It represents **an issue that divides decision makers**. The question should be one that is truly at issue or unresolved among those who must make the decision. It must pose a real dispute or controversy. It should meet the test of “the best answer has not yet been determined.”
4. The “should question” **entails core democratic values** in a serious and enduring way, for example, the value of privacy as it applies to searches of cars (without warrants) by police, rather than in a superficially popular and tabloid fashion, as in the value of privacy as applied to siblings eavesdropping on telephone conversations. The values should not get trivialized by selecting fleeting and sensational issues for study in school when we could select more meaningful issues (i.e., those that tend to recur from one generation to the next in slightly different contexts).
5. Make the “should question” **engaging to your students**. Social studies teachers can use issues from current events that their students express an interest in and that have meaning beyond the classroom setting.

6. The “should question” should be **cross disciplinary in social studies content**. That is, the data used to decide the public policy issue reflected in the should question can come from two or more of the social studies disciplines and be related to the social studies content standards.
7. The “should question” should be **clearly stated and clear in meaning**.

## **USING THE SCORING GUIDES**

The pages that follow contain scoring guides, sometimes called rubrics, for your use with students. The scoring guides were created from the content standards and benchmarks for each of the three standards of Conducting Investigations, Group Discussion, and Responsible Personal Conduct.

You will note that we have provided two different scoring guides for each of these three content standards. The first is labeled “Classroom Analytic Scoring Guide.” These are designed to be used by teachers in a way that will provide students with detailed, formative feedback on their progress toward achieving mastery of the elements that make up the content standards. Please note that we have defined performance level 3 in the Classroom Analytic Scoring Guides as meeting the standard. While some students might occasionally reach performance level 4, an accomplishment that should be recognized and rewarded, performance level 3 is your goal.

The Holistic Feature Scoring Guides allow teachers to provide a summative, standards-based assessment of student achievement at any given point in time. The Holistic Feature Scoring Guides build on the Classroom Analytic Scoring Guides by giving points to students who demonstrate that they have reached the standard for the elements (or features) that make up the content standard.